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## FAR EAST

### AUSTRALIA

## Position on Indonesian Annexation of East Timor

Australia has gradually softened its position toward Indonesia's incorporation of Portuguese East Timor. The Australians want to remove this major irritant from their relations with Indonesia.

Prime Minister Fraser's visit to Indonesia earlier this month helped this process. He did not repeat Australia's

past insistence on an internationally supervised referendum in East Timor, and he did not question President Suharto's statement that East Timor is now an inseparable part of Indonesia.

Both the former Labor government and Fraser's coalition have had to steer clear of any endorsement of the Indonesian takeover because of widespread

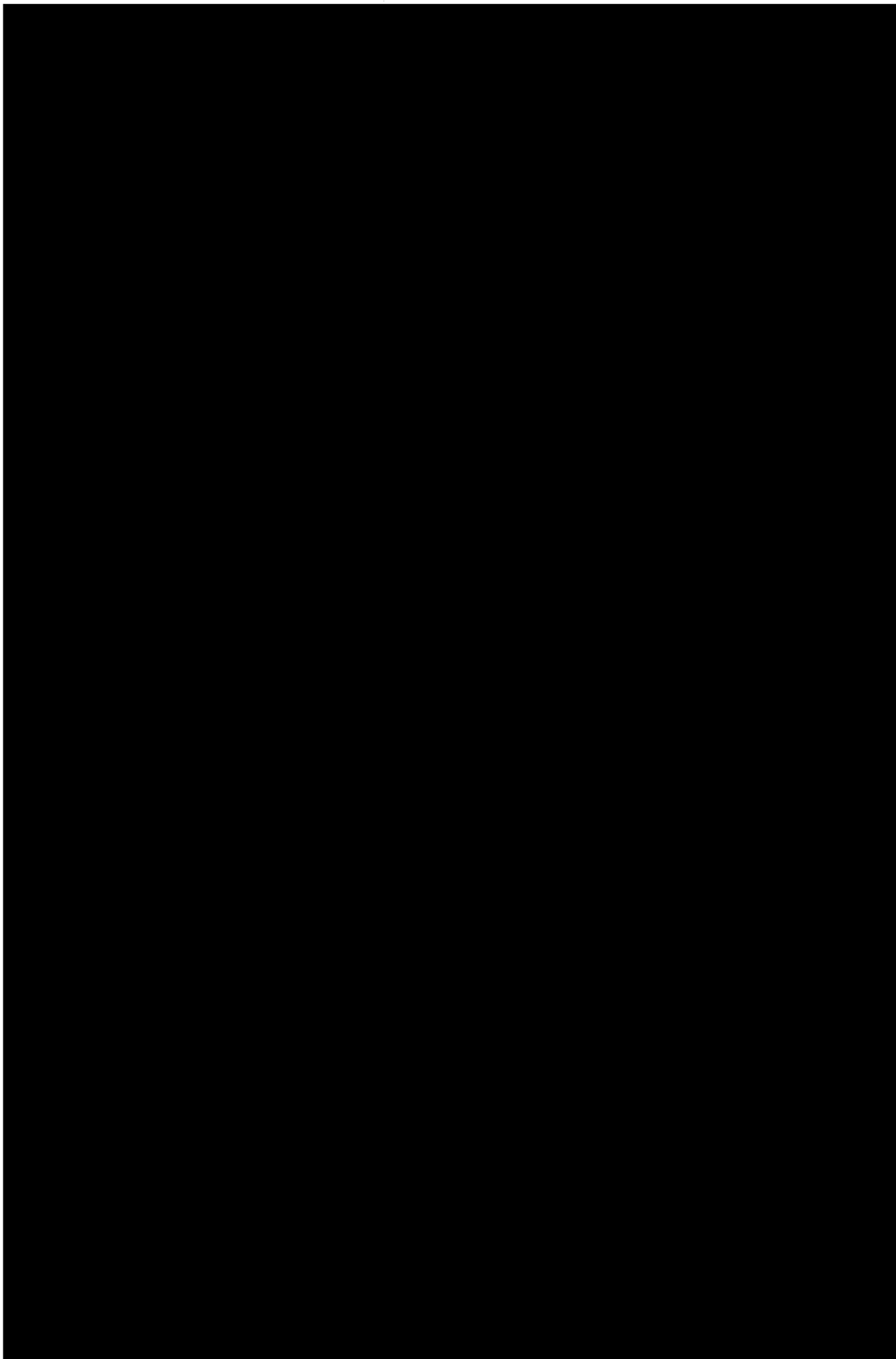
Australian public sympathy for Timorese independence. President Suharto recognizes that internal political considerations prevent the Australians from accepting Indonesian actions outright, and he is accepting the Prime Minister's noncommittal comments as tacit acceptance.

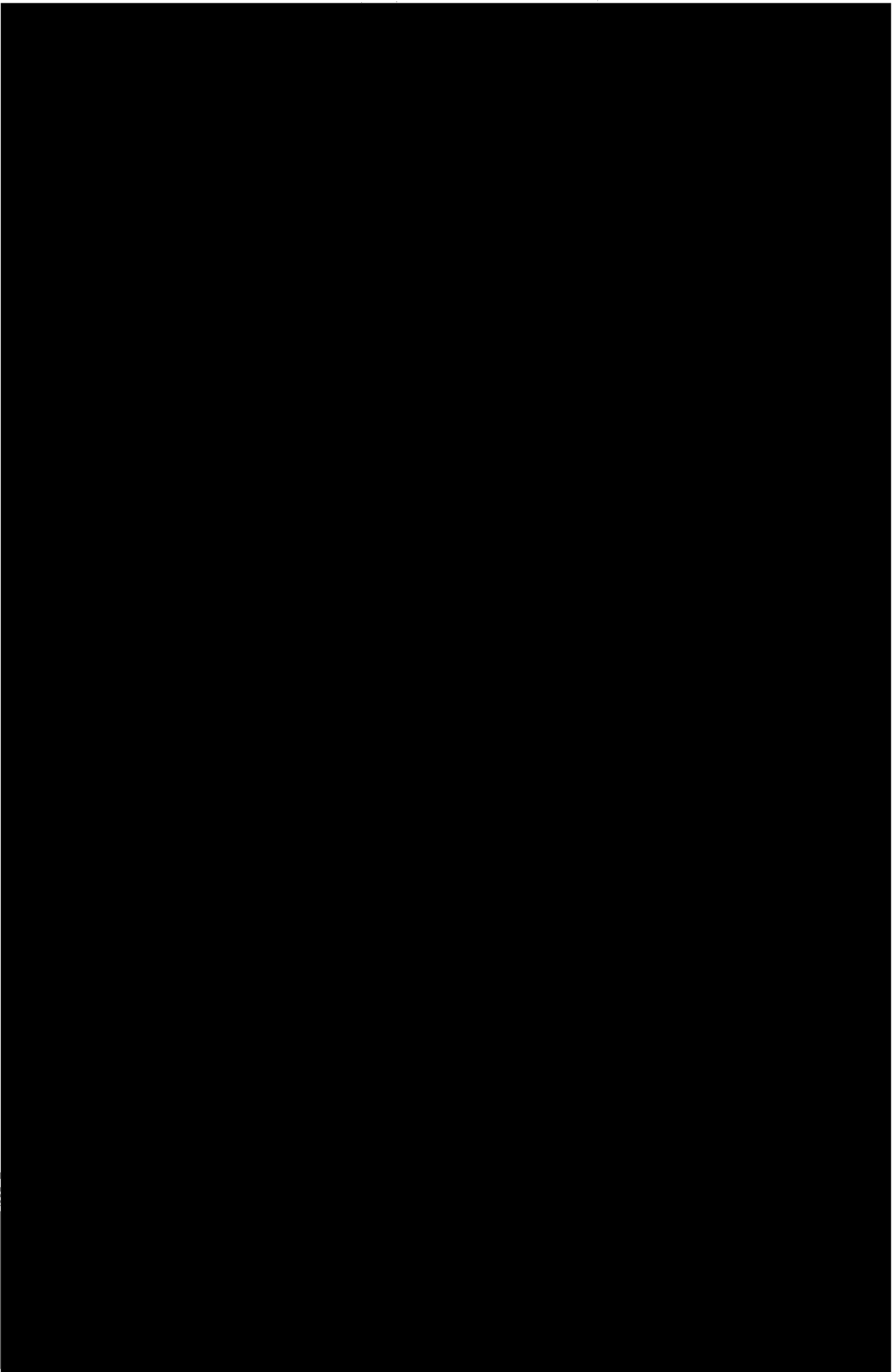
Australia's Labor opposition is still trying to use Timor as a political issue and has tried to present the Fraser government's attitude on the Timor issue as a sell-out. It is difficult to make this argument stick, however, when the previous Labor government itself over a year ago signaled Jakarta that it would acquiesce in a quick Indonesian takeover of the Portuguese colony.

Both Fraser and the Labor opposition appear to recognize that Australian public interest in Timor has declined, and the amount of political advantage that might be gained from a debate on the subject does not justify further damage to relations with Indonesia.

Foreign Minister Peacock's statement to Parliament last week that it does not serve Australia's interests to aggravate its largest neighbor is the most public indication so far that the Fraser government would like to put the Timor issue to rest.

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